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AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION BY RADIO

A compilation of radio information avenues open to
State and Regional Information people in the Agricultural
Conservation and Adjustment Administration.

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Herein is a discussion of ACAA radio broadcasting objectives,
and an analysis of the various types of radio information. Included
is a discussion of the radio medium in general....its advantages
and shortcomings....with an evaluation of the various types of radio
programing.

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WAR CALLS FOR NEW EMPHASIS ON RADIO BROADCASTING

With the transportation shortage reducing travel, farm people are depending on radio for more of their contacts with the outside world. Therefore, they should be encouraged to develop regular listening habits and dependence on radio programs.

The medium of radio should be used to the maximum in your information program. Some States already have all the radio time they can handle. Others can expand vastly.

All in all, radio is the growing medium. Now's the time to use it, and use it well.

NEED FOR GOOD BROADCASTS

Quality broadcasts are more important during the war than ever before.

The Office of Facts and Figures issues periodically a War Guide Listing for local stations suggesting priorities on radio topics for Government information. However, it is difficult to establish priorities on farm topics from a National scope, because problems vary by locality. But it is important that we deal with vital topics on our broadcasts if we expect stations to continue giving us time on the air.

There's another reason why we need to produce good broadcasts. The demands for radio time are increasing. We will have to produce better broadcasts to merit and retain time on the air.

WHAT IS A GOOD BROADCAST

Many people have attempted to set up standards of what are good and bad broadcasts. From time to time, many of these standards have been shattered. There is only one way of judging whether or not a broadcast is good. **DO PEOPLE LISTEN? DOES IT GET ITS MESSAGE ACROSS?**

No matter how a broadcast fits into preconceived standards, if the people who listen like it, and get something they need, or want, out of it, it's a good broadcast.

Many broadcasting authorities have been fooled on radio shows. Some shows considered as "sure-fire" just didn't take. Others that "just couldn't succeed," have found popular appeal.

However, you will be right over half the time if you apply one simple test to every broadcast you make. Ask yourself: "Will the folks I know ... my friends and neighbors and those who are only mildly interested in the farm program ... Will they be interested enough to listen through this program?"

Or is it a dull fifteen minutes of monotony? What would their reaction be to the program?" A good broadcast offers something to even those who are only mildly interested in the subject of the program.

There are three facts we do know:

- * 1. Broadcasts about real things by real people are much more effective than fiction broadcasts presented by amateurs. It is better not to attempt drama if you cannot do it professionally.
- * 2. People will listen more attentively to a discussion about real people and instances than about ideas.
- * 3. It's easier to hold audience attention with short broadcasts than with long ones. At best, you have trouble holding audience attention with 15 minutes of conversation. Fifteen-minute broadcasts should be the maximum, and five, or ten minute broadcasts have a better chance of being effective.

INFORMATION BY RADIO

We have three fundamental aims in our radio broadcasting . . . EDUCATION . . . INFORMATION . . . AND INSPIRATION.

Radio in itself cannot do a complete job of information. Its fundamental value is to pave the way for other informational mediums.

Radio deals in impressions. The listener carries away an impression of what has been said. While he could probably be convinced that contour farming is a good thing, he wouldn't remember the specific details on how to lay out a contoured field. Ask yourself a question: "How well do I remember details I hear on the radio? How long do I remember numbers and figures?" I think most of us are impressed only by their size. We don't remember the specific details on any one thing. Radio should be used in a general way to do the ground work for getting detailed information out through other mediums.

Of course you can't deal in generalities. You need to be specific with your topic and illustrations to leave general impressions.

There are three principal avenues available to us for broadcasting:

1. Provide information to radio stations to be incorporated into regular station programs.
2. Provide information to independent programs, or programs of other government agencies.
3. Present information on the air ourselves.

PROVIDING STATIONS WITH INFORMATION

News

United Press and Press Association, Inc. (A.P. Radio Service) provide regional wire services to radio stations. Each service sends a daily farm feature to all member stations. In most instances one office serves several States. If the office servicing your State is located in another State, that's all the more reason why they want your news. They want only the facts of the news. They prepare it in radio form.

Providing the wire services with news does not assure you that it will be used. It's effective if it's used, but even then only member stations get it. Therefore, it is also advisable to send news directly to radio stations having regular farm broadcasts. Regional and State people can provide news to regional stations, and county people can provide news to local stations.

Radio stations have specific news needs.

They need news prepared for the ear instead of for the eye. They need informal news. Here's a review of points to keep in mind when preparing radio news:

- * a. A news story on the radio leaves the listener with one over-all impression rather than number of specific facts about the story. Before writing, you should decide on the desired impression. Then write the story to develop that impression.
- * b. Prepare the copy to be read aloud. Prepare it for the ear . . . not the eye. Radio news editors attempt to rewrite news that has been prepared for the eye before they deliver it for the ear. But they are busy, and don't have time to rewrite all of it. You have a better chance of getting your news used if it reaches the station prepared for the ear. It can be used without a rewrite job.
- * c. Before you write, talk (for the ear) you must think talk. Therefore, you may want to talk out loud as you write. To write as you talk, talk as you write.
- d. Punctuate copy for the ear not the eye. Use contractions, mark pauses, underline words to be emphasized. Write the copy as it should be said because the lips utter what the eye sees.

Spot Announcements:

Radio stations can use spot announcements varying from 5 to 30 seconds in length. Many times a station has ten seconds to spare at station-break time. Of course, such announcements should be used only for specific campaigns. Even then, don't over-do it.

A spot announcement might be anywhere from 15 to 75 words long. No matter how many words, organize the copy to (a) attract attention, (b) arouse interest, (c) present the fact or facts, (d) create conviction, and (e) get action.

That's a formula for writing spot announcements.

INFORMATION FOR INDEPENDENT PROGRAMS OR PROGRAMS OF
OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Information and feature stories with a local angle are needed for national broadcasts such as the National Farm and Home Hour, and for short wave broadcasts directed to foreign countries. Such material should be routed through your Regional Representative of the Regional Contact section, Division of Information AAA.

PROGRAMS WE DO ON THE AIR

Types of Broadcasts:

TALKS:

Talks are probably the least desirable type of radio programs. It takes one who is master at using the English language, such as President Roosevelt, to hold an audience for any length of time. Few people can do it. There are exceptions. People who are definite characters and have a definite story to tell may be able to hold an audience for 5 to 7 minutes. But effective radio talks are the exception rather than the rule.

INTERVIEWS:

Interviews are a popular type of radio program today. However, interviews have their limitations. In a talk you are speaking directly to the audience. The audience listens in on an interview.

Someone has to ask questions. Now . . . who should ask what question? Certainly one committeeman should not ask another committeeman about the operation of the AAA program. And one SCS technician wouldn't ask another technician about conservation operations. A man who does regular farm shows, would not ask questions about farm developments, because the audience knows he already has the answers.

Therefore, an interview is more than a set of questions and answers. The person doing the interviewing needs to take part in the flow of thought. Yes . . . it's sometimes hard to draw a line of distinction between good interviews and discussions.

DISCUSSIONS:

When you have one or two farmers and a committeeman on a broadcast you usually have a discussion broadcast, where all contribute to the general flow of ideas. With such a group, a series of questions and answers does not make a good broadcast. It's not a good broadcast if I ask you a question . . . you answer it, and ask me one . . . Then we give Bill a chance to ask one. Then you ask him one. That's not discussion. But, when you, Bill and I sit around a microphone and talk about one topic, that is discussion.

Methods

SCRIPT:

Most radio programs are done from a script. Which means most effective programs depend on a good script. If you're going to talk informally, the script will have to be written informally. Further . . . there must be something in the script which will hold the audience attention. A broadcast packed with human interest, built around farmers and their experiences, has a good chance of holding an audience and presenting a point of view, a set of facts, or an impression.

AD LIB SHOWS:

Let's imagine radio as an individual. He's a young man just becoming of age. His growth and development through the years is interesting. But during his late teens (the last five years) our young man has really developed a personality. Today, he is a dignified, stately gentleman . . . BUT DEFINITELY INFORMAL. People like him best when he is himself. He's learned that. Therefore, he often talks "off the cuff."

Yes . . . ad lib programs are popular. They sound more genuine . . . and people listen to them. True . . . a few words are wasted in expressing what you want to say. But it's better to say little, and have it heard, than to say a lot, and not have it heard.

Ad lib shows are more work than script shows. An ad lib show goes through all the stages of script development . . . But it goes much farther. A good ad lib show might be done this way:

Write a script expressing the ideas of the group who will broadcast. Have the broadcast participants study and rehearse that script thoroughly. Make an outline of it. Throw the script away, and do the broadcast ad lib from the Outline. Then they'll be sure to talk as they do in every day life.

* An ad lib show does require a master of ceremonies who has a fluent use of the English language.

Use

We can use committeemen and farmer broadcasts in two distinct ways. Where a radio station has a regular farm show, it is sensible that we participate as a part of that regular show. The listening audience is waiting for us.

Another way is to arrange for a regular time on the air, for our own program. This involves the job of building an audience. Something is needed to tie the program together from one broadcast to the next . . . Something more than a theme song. Maybe it's a short news feature. Maybe it's a personality on each program, such as the same person from the radio station taking an active part in every broadcast.

No matter what device is used, something is needed to tie the programs together from one broadcast to the other, so that over a period of time, the program can be readily identified and an audience established.

When you decide on your method . . . don't forget those townspeople in the area. We want them to tune in to our programs, too.

Organization

STATE AND REGIONAL

Broadcasts on high-powered regional stations should in general be handled through State and regional offices. Officials, such as soils specialists, State committeemen and farmer fieldmen, might be the major source of participants. However, they might use a farmer guest to appear with them on the broadcast in order to bring in testimony and human interest.

COUNTY

The real future in a decentralized radio information program is to place much of the radio responsibility on county people. Some might furnish local stations with spot news, some might present it on the air themselves, and some might group themselves in circuits (round robin style) of five or ten counties to share a regular broadcast period on a local station . . . each taking a turn at the broadcast. One or all of these methods might be used by a county. No matter how it's done, **THE COUNTIES PREPARE THEIR OWN COPY.**

If a solid foundation is laid for a county circuit, it will almost run itself once in operation. The big job in laying that foundation is to develop enthusiasm for broadcasting in the county office. Generally, radio stations are attracted by the idea of bringing new and different voices to the air. Local stations appreciate this opportunity to bring farmers direct from the farm to the studio. Such a broadcast is a big occasion for people who have never appeared on radio. If they are not regular station listeners, they and their friends, very likely will be. And by the same token it makes friends for us.

It'll take some guidance and training from the state or regional office.

SCHOOLS

This might be done through radio schools, where you call together all people concerned with the broadcasts on one station, and hold a day's session on radio broadcasting. Such schools have a two-fold purpose. To give the county people some practical assistance with radio broadcasting, and bolster their enthusiasm. And they'll need a new shot of inspiration about every 6 or 9 months. At the same time repeat school offers you an opportunity to continue teaching them more about radio. And what better way is there to learn than to take a lesson, apply what you've learned on several broadcasts, take another lesson, then apply that. Remember . . . you can't teach the county people all about radio over night. However, under such a program, the chances of having a well decentralized program at the end of two years are good.

WASHINGTON ASSISTANCE TO THE FIELD

1. Provide general information on program developments which can be localized and adapted for radio as well as other uses.
2. Act as a clearing house between regions for program ideas developed locally.
3. Provide some program ideas developed in Washington, through the ACAA Information Calendar.
4. Provide occasional skeleton broadcast outlines on timely topics to be developed locally.
5. Keep the field informed on new developments in the broadcasting industry.
6. Offer assistance (both from Washington and from Regional Contact) to help states and counties improve broadcast quality.
7. Provide transcriptions for special campaigns. (Such as Wheat Marketing Quota Referendum) With the Office of Facts and Figures passing out priorities on government transcriptions developed nationally, very few campaign transcriptions will be sent from Washington.
8. Provide radio materials upon request to help train county people in preparing their own broadcasts.

FOR EVERYBODY

Washington, regional, state and county people at every opportunity should renew personal contacts and cement relationships with the folks at the radio station.